

KUWAITI JET HIJACKING

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LEHRER: An American view of it now from Stansfield Turner, retired Navy admiral and former head of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Carter administration. Admiral, what is your assessment of how Iran handled this thing? STANSFIELD TURNER (former CIA director): I think it's very difficult to say that they could have done it faster or better. One can see how it could have been done better and faster. But we just don't know enough of the facts at this point. I think we have to give them the benefit of the doubt that they moved as expeditiously as they thought they could. Now if Iran was not supporting terrorism around the world and was not a pariah in that regard, they could have called on us or the Germans or the Israelis or other people to come in, and real experts to help them, and it could have been solved quicker. But on their own resources, perhaps they did as well as they could.

LEHRER: Is the problem here, ah, the reason that people are so suspicious of the Iranians is because they're so tied to terrorism? TURNER: Well, we can't pin on Iran at this point that they collaborated with the hijackers, but we have a lot of cause to be suspicious--the point you've just made, that they've been supporting terrorists, anti-American terrorists, particularly in Beirut; at least there seemed to be a lot of good intelligence reports, ah, the point that Robin just made that they have demanded the release of the same people that the hijackers wanted. But I can't see how they could storm that airplane and very few people get injured if any and certainly none of the hijackers, from what we know. But, again, we haven't got all the facts, but it certainly is a suspicious element. At the same time, the real test is going to come when the Iranians do what the ambassador says they're going to do, take them before the law in his country. There seems to be little doubt that those hijackers committed some very heinous crimes, torture and, of course, two killings of Americans. If they don't receive some real meaningful punishment, then I think our suspicions should be heightened even more. In the meantime, we've gotta give them the benefit of the doubt. But let's be duly skeptical until we see if they take some meaningful action against these hijackers.

LEHRER: There was, as I'm sure you know, Admiral, a lot of people who were very careful with their words today until those two Americans are even out of Tehran. The ambassador just said, though, that they will be free to leave. Any reason to question that? TURNER: Well, he's

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